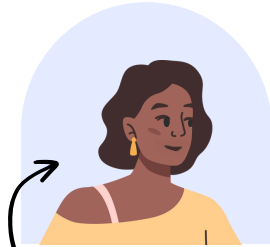


With practice, everyone can become more mindful, or aware and fully present in the current moment. **The What Skills of mindfulness simply describe *what to do when practicing mindfulness: observe, describe, or participate.*** Practicing these skills helps us fully experience reality as it truly is, rather than get caught up in assumptions, memories, or worries. Because each skill requires our full attention and awareness, note that each should be practiced one at a time:



Watching, listening,
observing, sensing



observe

- Noticing what is happening
- Observing what is going on with your five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell)
- Observing your own: thoughts, emotions, behavior urges, and body sensations

OR



I notice they are
singing, smiling...



describe

- Labeling with words
- Naming what you can *observe* (perceive with your senses), not your *interpretation* or *assumption* about what is happening
- Naming your internal experiences

OR

Fully immersed and
engaged in the moment



participate

- Fully engaging in what you are doing, without judging
- Going with the flow, acting intuitively and effortlessly
- Letting go of self-consciousness

*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.



Observing

What is observing?

Mindfully observing is:

- Purposely paying attention to what is going on right now (the present moment).
- Using your senses to take in information (seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling) outside of you, as well as sensing your own internal thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behavior urges.
- Taking control of your attention: bringing your mind back to what you are observing when you get distracted; not ignoring or pushing away sensations; not getting stuck on one sensation.
- Observing is *not*: acting, reacting, labeling, or describing your experience. Just paying attention.

Why is observing important?

- Observing helps us be **present** - in the current moment, in our minds, in our bodies - not stuck in memories of the past or worries about the future.
- Observing shows us **reality as it is**. If we're stuck in our thoughts or assumptions, or trying to avoid things, we might miss details or get them wrong.
- Observing helps us **change things**. It's much harder to change things (e.g., how we react to stress) if we aren't fully aware of them.

What does observing look like?

Mindfully observing looks like paying attention to:



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Describing

What is describing?

Mindfully describing is:

- Labeling your observations with words - like, “I see my friend is smiling,” “I observe that I’m thinking about work tomorrow,” or, “I notice that I’m feeling relaxed.”
- Putting words to the facts of an experience (the who, what, where, and when), not your interpretations, guesses, or assumptions about the experience (the why and how).
- Naming *only* the things that you can observe with your senses:
 - Your own thoughts, feelings, sensations, or behavior urges
 - The words other people say, others’ facial expressions, others’ behaviors
 - *Not* what you can’t observe: others’ thoughts, feelings, intentions

Why is describing important?

- Describing helps us **reduce distress** by focusing us on the facts - not our assumptions, guesses, associations, or worries *about* the facts.
- Describing invites **helpful feedback**. Others can hear our descriptions and offer validation or another point of view.
- Describing helps us **process**. Putting things into words helps us organize our thoughts, recognize patterns, etc.

What does describing look like?

Mindfully describing looks like the thoughts and statements on the left - **not** the ones on the right:



✓ *I notice my shoulders are feeling tense*
 ✓ *I notice he’s getting louder and more terse*
 ✓ *“I feel upset about what you said yesterday”*
 ✓ *I notice I’m feeling frustrated and hurt*
 ✓ *“When you said, ‘I don’t have time for this,’ I started to think you don’t care about me”*

✗ *He’ll never understand my point of view*
 ✗ *He’s angry with me*
 ✗ *He said that to hurt me yesterday*
 ✗ *“You don’t care about me”*

These thoughts and statements are about things the person can observe himself (his own thoughts, feelings, and reactions)

These thoughts and statements are about things the person **can’t** observe himself (the future, his friend’s feelings and intentions)

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Participating

What is participating?

Mindfully participating is:

- Being fully present in the moment, without self-consciousness, and non-judgmentally.
- Going with the flow, following your intuition, acting spontaneously.
- Being “one” with what you are doing.

Why is participating important?

- Participating **connects us** to other people, the activity, and the environment more fully.
- Participating is **fulfilling**. Like being in a flow state, participating feels effortless, skillful, and joyful.
- Participating gives us a **break from self-consciousness**. When we are one with what we are doing, we are not “watching” or judging ourselves. The self-critic is silent. We get to just enjoy.

What does participating look like?



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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.





Tools for Self-Assessment and Psychoeducation

Figuring out the next step in your mental health journey can be overwhelming. Developed by psychologists, the tools at [ChoosingTherapy.com](https://choosingtherapy.com) can help. Our mental health self-assessment quizzes can help you explore common symptoms of mental health concerns, as well as find the best therapy style for you. Our mental health worksheets can guide you through therapy concepts and how to use them in your life.

[Learn More with Mental Health Quizzes](#)

Our collection of psychologist-developed mental health quizzes can help you learn if you are experiencing mild, moderate, or concerning levels of anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and more. Each quiz also provides targeted resources based on your answers. These self-assessments are designed to offer insight, not diagnoses, and can be a helpful first step in recognizing symptoms and deciding whether to seek further support. If you have concerns about your mental health or your quiz results, we recommend you reach out to a licensed mental health professional.



[Free Mental Health Worksheets](#)

Search our collection of therapy worksheets by mental health topic, therapy modality, or demographic group. Our free, psychologist-developed worksheets make therapy exercises understandable and relevant to daily life. Find worksheets for help with ADHD, anxiety, depression, relationship difficulties, and other common mental health challenges.